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AUTHOR Honig, Alice Sterling
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ABSTRACT

Singing is an important skill for the positive management of children's behaviors. Throughout the ages, caregivers have sung babies to sleep with lullabies and cradle songs. As a powerful tool to communicate care and understanding, singing to babies increases closeness between caregiver and children and nourishes an early love of singing. Singing promotes the learning of daily routines, eases separation troubles, stretches a child's memorizing power, builds motor skills, and increases group cohesion. Caregivers who are uncomfortable about singing should remember that babies are not concerned about perfect pitch or complicated melodies. Singing a simple, two-note tune or nursery rhyme is a good way to begin the habit of singing. Even if a caregiver's first language differs from that of the infants being cared for, babies will love the cadences and feelings that the songs provide. Singing soothes, gives somatic reassurance of love, awakens early humor in toddlers, and boosts early language skills. Singing should be encouraged by caring adults who can express their pleasure in the early self-made songs of babies and provide rich opportunities for babies to hear and enjoy singing by real people. (M7)

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SINGING WITH INFANTS AND TODDLERS

Alice Sterling Honig, Ph.D.

Syracuse University

How important is singing as a skill for more positive management of children's behaviors? How early do babies learn to love music and can they learn better if melody is used to enhance lessons? Sing-song melodies are used by very young babies as they practice sounds and words in their cribs. A baby may chant "Oogie, woogie, poogie" melodically over and over. Or, a young toddler may cheerfully chant a song her papa sings to her nightly about going over the garden wall, while accompanying her own artless singing by climbing over and out of her crib in rhythm with the words and melody (as happens in the film "Out of the mothes of babes" by Peter and Jill De Villiers). As you listen to the songs of babies, realize that self-songs give pleasure to babies. Sometimes hum wordlessly or even dance slowly with a babe in arms as you both hum wordless melodies in rhythm. Take your cue from the baby humming his or her own sing-song. Sometimes just listen and enjoy! Singing is a natural gift that can be encouraged daily by caring adults who express their pleasure in the early self-made songs of babies and provide rich opportunities for babies to hear and enjoy singing by real people.

Singing Soothes Babies

Throughout the ages, parents and nannies have sung restless babies to sleep with lullabies and cradle songs. Brahms' lullaby is a famous example. Indeed, there

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are volumes of songs from many lands that reflect this universal adult creation of special songs to lull babies. Some cradle songs in other languages are particularly beautiful in the tenderness of their imagery, as, for example, the old Ladino lullaby: "Duermete hijico mio". Babies will respond to cradle songs of all ages and languages. The heritage of African-American cradle songs are among the most poignantly beautiful. "All the pretty little horses" soothes babies to sleep with promises: "Hush-a-bye, don't you cry ; go to sleepy little baby. When you wake, you shall have all the pretty little horses".

Some lullaby songs reflect the hidden sorrows of indentured servant girls forced to rock a cradle for hours, as in "Rock-a bye baby in the tree tops", where the words of the song send both the cradle and baby crashing down!

Many a parent, whose arms are weary from holding and patting a fretful infant, has rejoiced that just humming two tones with the simple soothing sounds "Ah-uh, Ah-uh, Ah-uh" over and over helps baby sink into that drowsiness so devoutly desired by a sleepy parent pacing the living room in the darkness of the night and frustrated because nursing and cuddling have still not sent baby back to dreamland.

The Melodic Message of Cherishing

Singing can be a powerful tool for letting a baby know that you care, that you understand her feelings or his needs.

Richard knew that Natalie Bess was fairly new in the child care center. When the 16- month- old woke from her nap, she started to cry forlornly. As Richard

drew near to the crib, Natalie Bess looked at her caregiver from lowered lids and seemed ready to bawl even louder. Richard began singing softly on just a few simple tones: "Natalie is waking up from her nap time. Natalie is waking up. Natalie is getting up from her sleepy-sleep time. Guess who is waking up now. Natalie Bess is finishing her nap. She wants to wake up from nap time. Soon we will change her diaper. Soon we will give her some milk. Natalie Bess had a good nap."

The simple melody with hypnotic repetition of words, made up to fit a particular occasion, and repeated over and over, reassures baby that someone cares, someone wants to soothe. Nobody will pick her up abruptly into strange arms to change a diaper before she has fully awakened and accepted these strange new surroundings. When a baby hears his own name repeated over and over in the phrases of the song, he feels that he is in a place where people know him and can comfort him. Thus, caregivers use song early in an infant's life to remind babies that they are cherished and adults are sensitive to their tempos and needs to feel secure and in familiar surroundings.

Thus, by their earliest attempts to soothe babies with singing, and to reassure babies with chants and melodies, caregivers nourish an early love of singing. Of course, at the same time, self esteem is built when the caregiver sings songs that frequently mention a baby's name or that have words directly speaking to the baby's importance. A good example of that kind of song is the chorus of the "Sailboat song", which assures: "And when I've found my island so shiny and new, I'll turn

about my sailboat and I'll sail home to you. Lullaby, lullaby."

When Should You Start Singing with Babies?

When should you start singing with a baby and for a baby? From birth the baby is primed for the pleasure of your voice and your singing. Croon to your tiny babies. Sing soft songs as you change a diaper. Let the song be about what you are doing with the baby, or what the baby is doing with a toy or with food as she or he munches during mealtime. Teach formal songs too, but interweave them with spontaneous "made-up songs" that reflect the interests and activities of your daily routines. Don't make a big deal about a baby "learning" a song for you. As the babies takes pleasure in the familiar songs you sing daily, as they get comfortable with rhythms and rhymes, gestures and words, they will gradually try to copy you, their special caregiver. If the relationship between you and your babies is warm and loving, then they will try even harder to copy your songs. Thus, your teaching seems artless as you imbue babies with love for the art of singing songs.

Ability to Learn Tunes: Babies Differ

Babies differ immensely in their ability to hum along at singing time, and to carry a tune or learn words. Some can carry a tune excellently prior to two years of age. Some children cannot carry a tune even well past the preschool years. They may be fairly accurate rhythmically, but a teacher may have to guess hard to understand which song a child is trying so proudly to sing for the group.

Daniel came home from his childcare center humming away "A tisket, a tasket, a green and yellow basket". At 24 months, his pronunciation of words was

not too clear. But he was singing zestfully and in tune a new song that his teacher had obviously sung with them that very day. "I was amazed," reported his mom. "I did not know that he could learn new songs so well, although his papa and I have sung him songs at bedtimes since he was born."

Songs Promote Learning Daily Routines

Teachers can use songs and chants frequently and in many different situations throughout the day not only in order to give pleasure to toddlers, but to help ease the children into learning the daily rhythms and routines of the childcare facility. Using song verses such as "This is the way we brush our teeth, brush our teeth, brush our teeth. This is the way we brush our teeth so early in the morning" is likely to get far more enthusiastic compliance than simply requiring toddlers to carry out personal chores. Singing facilitates cooperation.

Chants and songs are particularly useful at transition times in order to make the adjustment to change more understandable and more palatable for infants- who are often very conservative about any change in their daily rhythms and activities. Choose a few notes for a transition chant. The notes from the song "See saw, Margery Daw" are particularly appropriate. Then just make up repetitive and soothing words to give infants plenty of time to adjust to a change. "Soon it will be time for lunch. Soon we will put away our blocks. Soon we will be washing our hands for lunch". Repetition of a few simple, clear ideas about the activity to come and the sequence of steps can help a child to focus on what will happen, when it will happen, and how it will happen. Tots are notorious for a lacking a sense of timing.

Many a young child informs the teacher proudly that his birthday is in a few days, when it is months away. A sing-song set of describing words helps smooth the way for transitions and for focusing on the actual procedures and practices for a particular routine or game.

Songs Ease Separation Troubles

Some infants and toddlers have much grief in separating from a loved parent when they enter the childcare facility. Sometimes caregivers are surprised that a young toddler who seemed so well adjusted for the first month now starts to wilt, look sad, and cry each day. Songs can help reflect the toddler's dearest wish - that the parent return.

Shoshannah wanted to go home. She could not nap easily and was disconsolate. Her caregiver patted her back soothingly and started a low chanting song to the tune of "The farmer in the dell." She sang: "You want your mommy to come back. You want your mama to come back. You want your mama to come back soon. You want your mama to come back." Over and over the caregiver slowly sang the simple melody with firm conviction. After about twenty repetitions, during which Shoshannah had quieted and breathed more easily on her cot, the caregiver stopped singing. The toddler stirred restlessly. "Sing more," she asked simply. So Miss Alice sang the song softly several more times until the toddler fell asleep. Next day, at nap time, the toddler specifically asked her caregiver: "Sing me the 'I Want my mama to come back' song". Satisfied with the simple song sung several times over,

Shoshannah dozed off comfortably.

Build Trust with Personally Tailored Songs

Singing has deep emotional healing power. You do not have to be a Metropolitan Opera star to create a simple WISH melody to sing over and over to soothe an infant who is distressed. DO make sure that the wish expressed in the song you sing really reflects the child's need. Then sing about what the child wishes for. The sincerity of your song will heal the child's loneliness or feelings of separation anxiety. And the child will feel that music (and the caregiver!) are friends, to be deeply trusted.

Love of Poetry and Imagery

Teachers can use songs to give tots much aesthetic pleasure in funny or delightful or richly onomatopoeic poetry. Setting some poems to simple chanting notes or melodies gives toddlers an opportunity to learn even more thoroughly their favorite rhymes and poems. A good example would be Piglet and Pooh-Bear's chant from "The house at Pooh Corner" :

"The more it SNOWS -tiddley-pom, The more it GOES-tiddley-pom, the more it GOES-tiddley-pom , on snowing."

Stretching a Child's Memorizing Power

Young children take extreme pride in their growing ability to learn long songs as they become older toddlers. Thus, some of the long songs that tell vivid tales are asked for over and over by children learning to anticipate and to remember. "The fox went out on a chilly night, and he prayed for the moon for to give him light" is an

old English song that toddlers love. They listen so quietly to hear the story of the fox (who cheerfully and successfully swiped some geese and ducks for his family's dinner, despite old mother Flipper-flopper sounding the alarm to her husband) that bedtime becomes more peaceful as the toddlers settle down, trying hard to listen to and remember all the words to each verse. Such long songs stretch a toddler's attention span even when not all the words are clearly understood. The power of the story carries the toddler into quietness.

Another long song much beloved of toddlers is "Hush little baby don't say a word, Papa's going to buy you a mocking bird". Memorizing this song is easier for little ones because each verse builds on the image and concept of the previous verse. So, for example, the second verse assures: "If that mocking bird won't sing, Papa's going to buy you a diamond ring." The greatest gift a three -and- four year old childcare group ever gave to me was to have me hush as I walked in the door one day and (since they had heard this song daily for months) listen to them sing it for me from start to finish! Remember that toddlers love to hear a song over and over and over. Do not worry about starting again at the end of a song. Indeed, some songs like "Twinkle, twinkle, little star" repeat the first two lines as the last two lines of this brief and much-beloved song. Repetition builds mental muscles as toddlers practice listening and storing in memory the rhyming couplets or verses in songs. Also do not worry if there are somewhat archaic words in a song. If the context is rich and vivid, children take esoteric words in stride. A good example is the word "strife" in the final verse of the fox song, which relates that "The fox and his wife,

without any strife, cut up that goose with a fork and a knife. Never did you see such a supper in your life. And the little ones chewed on the bones O, bones O, bones O", with the last line repeated in chorus. Some long songs have themes that are too complex and may have some scary components except for the oldest toddlers, as the song : "Mister Froggy went a-courting and he did ride, Um-Hum, Um-hum". That rather interminable song ends with the whole wedding party for Miss Mousie and Mister Froggy being eaten by a big black snake. Yet toddlers may well delight in joining in the humming chorus and hearing the long list of wedding guests and their gifts, such as the moth who brought the tablecloth.

Building Motor Skills Through Songs

Some songs are accompanied by hand motions, as is "The Eentsy-Beentsy Spider" song. Some are accompanied by more large muscle body actions, as "Ring around a rosy" and " Put your right foot in; put your right foot out." "Songs to sing with babies" by "Miss Jackie" Weissman provides a variety of simple songs babies will enjoy. Single note melodies are provided for piano, and accompanying body motions are clearly specified. Some songs are old favorites, such as "Old MacDonald had a farm". Others help a baby learn about fingers and other delightful and personally important subjects. Even the youngest babies grin while a caregiver sings "This little piggy goes to market" and wiggles each precious baby toe.

"Row, row, row your boat" is simple enough for young toddlers and they can carry out vigorous rowing arm motions while singing. "Sally go round the sun, Sally go round the moon; Sally go round the chimney tops, every afternoon, BOOM!"

is a simple circle song particularly beloved of younger toddlers who love to fall down giggling (or even before, in anticipation) at the word "BOOM".

Taking a walk outdoors while holding hands almost impels a song to accompany the rhythms of walking. "We're going for a walk" sung to the melody of the "Farmer in the Dell" allows you and the children to add any ideas you wish after the three repetitions of the main line. The more absurd the words added, the more that toddlers will giggle. An example would be "To catch a wiggly whale" Each toddler can be given a chance to tack on an ending line no matter how silly it sounds.

Vary the kinds of songs you sing with infants and toddlers. Some will serve the purpose of increasing their attention span more if they sing with you and concentrate on the song words and meanings. Some songs will provide a refreshing opportunity for infants and toddlers to move their limbs and acquire grace and exercise while singing along or listening to you and feeling the actions you are carrying out as you dramatize the song with their bodies, as in "Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, baker's man".

Instruments that are simple, such as blocks to click together or a triangle to tap with a metal stick, boost a toddler's eye-hand coordination and fine motor skills when they are offered as accompaniments to early group singing experiences (Moomaw, 1984).

What if a Caregiver is Uncomfortable about Singing?

Suppose you are not too comfortable yourself with singing. Perhaps a family member ridiculed you as being off tune when you were very little. Babies are not particular about how complicated a tune is or how perfect your pitch is. Start with two simple notes, a higher one and a lower one. Sing to your baby while you are both seated on the floor facing one another. Hold her hands in yours and see-saw back and forth as you croon "Back and forth, back and forth, (Baby's name) and I are going back and forth" (Honig & Lally, 1981). From this sing-song beginning with just two notes, move to create two-tone melodies for washing up a baby, or for putting-away-toys-time. "Now we are washing your face. Now we clean your chinny- chin. Now we wash your pretty ears". Two notes can go a long way to create a song that baby will enjoy and find easy to learn. Chants that depend on raising each new line just one note higher may be easier for you. You could try this when you play "This little piggy goes to market. This little piggy stays home. This little piggy has roast beef. This little piggy has none. This little piggy goes 'Wee,wee,wee,wee, wee wee all the way home!" Incidentally, one toddler with whom I gently played this toe-touching and tummy-tickle game told his mom later that I had made a mistake. In his vegetarian family, "tofu" was substituted for "roast beef" in the chant!

If you are worried about learning new melodies, try the old nursery rhyme tunes as the basis for your songs. "Mary had a little lamb" or "Pop goes the weasel" are fun tunes you can use to create personalized songs with your babies about what

they are doing, eating, playing or experiencing. The familiar melody you may feel most at ease in trying is the tune of "Happy birthday to you". If that melody is comfortable, then use it to create new songs about personal important-to-babies topics. For example: count fingers or toes to this melody or sing out the names of body parts you are washing as you use this melody. Or try the melody at first while story telling.

What If English Is Not Your First Language?

If you as a caregiver have a first language different from that of the infants and toddlers you care for, be sure to use the folk songs and lullaby songs of your people at nap times. Also, while toddlers are self-feeding in their high chairs, or getting ready for food to be served prior to lunch, feel free to sing them your songs. They will love the cadences and the feelings that come through. They may even learn a bit of the songs. Many toddlers can sing "Frere Jacques" over and over, although they do not "understand" the words of that French song for young children. Babies are incredible language learners. Research teaches us that even a half-hour per day with a parent who speaks an entirely different language from the other family members will result in the baby understanding a great deal of the parent's language and knowing many words expressively by the end of the first year. Share the richness of your musical heritage with your babies!

Songs Increase Group Cohesion

Beginning each day at circle time with a greeting song helps the children feel deeply comfortable with their companions. Be sure to choose a repetitive, simple

song, where the children just need to know their own names at first. "Good morning little yellow bird, yellow bird, yellow bird; good morning little yellow bird. Who are you?" The teacher begins and points to one child. The group then sings again and the chosen child points to another. Each chosen youngster sings "My name is-----" and repeats the name several times as required by the melody, which is the same for each line.

Singing increases closeness between caregiver and children. Singing soothes, gives somatic reassurance of love, awakens early humor in toddlers, boosts early language skills, and helps babies learn long phrases which they have heard with pleasure in melodies sung over and over for them and with them. Teachers who make up songs as needed feel a surge of satisfaction at their creative skills and ability to awaken young children's interest in music, chant and melody. Singing increases joy in the classroom!

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